



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

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POLICE CUSTODY IN KENT– GENERALLY GOOD

Police custody facilities in Kent were positive in many respects, with some excellent provision, though there were some concerns, said Nick Hardwick, Chief Inspector of Prisons, and Dru Sharpling, HM Inspector of Constabulary, publishing the report of a joint inspection into custody suites in Kent.

The inspection was part of a national programme of joint inspections of police custody and covered nine custody suites serving Gravesend, Gillingham, Maidstone, Sittingbourne, Tonbridge, Canterbury, Margate, Dover and Folkestone. Additional cells in standby suites at the Bluewater shopping centre and Longport were also visited.

Overall, there were some areas of excellent practice. However there were also areas for improvement.

Inspectors were pleased to find that:

- there was clear strategic leadership and a clear strategy for improving the estate, supported by the police authority;
- staffing levels were, in the main, adequate;
- there was a positive approach to balancing detainees' rights against case progression;
- cells were generally clean and free from graffiti;

- staff were aware of diversity issues and routinely questioned detainees about any dependencies;
- primary health care services were extremely good with well-developed clinical governance arrangements and robust medicines management; and
- mental health diversion services were excellent.

However, there were some concerns:

- there was scope to improve recording of the use of force and analysis of that data to identify trends or issues for attention;
- the overall approach to initial risk assessment and hand-over of details or risk was mixed and there was a lack of privacy at booking-in desks;
- there were ligature points in some cells; and
- too many detainees were still held in police stations as a place of safety under Section 136 of the Mental Health Act.

Nick Hardwick and Dru Sharpling said:

“Overall this inspection identified some good, and indeed some excellent, aspects of custody provision in Kent. However, this report sets out a number of findings and recommendations which we believe will assist the Chief Constable and Police Authority to improve the quality of custody provision further.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. A copy of the full report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 5 April 2011 at www.justice.gov.uk/inspectorates/hmi-prisons
2. HM Inspectorate of Prisons is an independent inspectorate, inspecting places of detention to report on conditions and treatment, and promote positive outcomes for those detained and the public.
3. HM Inspectorate of Constabulary is an independent inspectorate, inspecting policing in the public interest, and rigorously examines the effectiveness of police forces and authorities to tackle crime and terrorism, improve criminal justice and raise confidence. HMIC inspects and regulates all 43 police forces in England and Wales

together with other major policing bodies such as the Serious Organised Crime Agency, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the British Transport Police and HMRC.

4. This joint inspection was carried out from 29 November–3 December 2010.
5. Please contact Jane Parsons (HMIP Press Office) on 0207 035 2123 or 07880 787452 from 0915 to 1430 Monday to Friday or Sharon Kalina (HMIC Press Office) on 020 7802 1824 if you would like more information or to request an interview.